

THE ELECTRIC SCANDAL

by Sherman H. Skolnick, moderator/producer "BroadSides" Chicago public access Cable TV Program, since 1991, and chairman/founder, since 1963, Citizen's Committee to Clean Up the Courts

Thomas A. Edison, a mostly self-educated wizard, ended up with a lot of things named after him. One of those is the Chicago-based COMMONWEALTH EDISON CO., supplying power for a large part of Illinois.

Although some may praise Edison, the inventor, lately they curse his namesake, Edison, the electric utility. Why? Frequent black-outs and high rates are too easy of an answer.

Edison is the largest nuclear electric firm in the U.S. Because of its nuke plants being old or just plain trouble, the firm still uses plenty of fossil fuel generators. And some of those are old enough to apply for a Social Security pension. Some claim some of Edison's facilities are almost 90 years old. For years, Edison paid a dependable dividend to stockholders who are not inclined to have the latest, most modern equipment at the expense of a reduced dividend. And Edison is loaded with a mountain of debt owed to banks owned by America's banker-judges.

One of the largest owners of Edison is a foreign, absentee owner, the VATICAN, through a Netherlands front, ROBECO. This is quite natural, since Chicago is the largest Catholic Archdiocese in the U.S. And the Pope also owns several other sizeable enterprises in Chicago. And like any faraway owner, they are principally interested in the bottom-line take-home profit of their property, rather than the comfort of local utility rate-payers or customers. Also, the Vatican owns the water works in Rome, and many there similarly claim lack of good service.

When Edison applied for yet another nuclear facility license in the 1970s, a Chicago political activist, Harriet Sherman [a member of our court reform group], fought them. The basis of her objection: that the U.S. Atomic Energy Act prohibits foreign ownership of nuclear facilities in the U.S. Ignoring the Vatican ownership question, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission rejected her petition. Edison used their muscle to inflict reprisals. Without a proper basis, Edison arbitrarily cut off her residential electric service. No one in authority seemed to care or offer a remedy. The Vatican is not only a foreign separate sovereignty, as law books refer to it, but, moreover, is a religious government, a theocracy. By the way, the Vatican also has owned the other major nuclear electric plants in the U.S., in Virginia and in Florida.

The false cut-off of the loudmouth's electric service ended up as an unpublicized damage suit in Chicago's courts. As plaintiff, she forced 16 local judges, some not even Catholics, but beholden to Edison and the Vatican, to one by one disqualify themselves. Some judges gave hour-long court speeches, in response to her demand that they divulge whether they are so beholden, to explain away why as NON-CATHOLICS, they as judges were still somehow obligated to the Vatican. One Judge told her in Court, in my presence, "You forgot to ask me whether the Archdiocese and the Vatican are the ones necessary to get me on the election ballot in this County." So she asked and he

said "You do not get on the ballot at all, Catholic or not, without their blessings." He removed himself.

Tired of her targetting so many judges, one by one, and to avoid a messy trial, the Vatican-owned Commonwealth Edison Company quietly settled. The activist was happy ending up with a long-needed new roof for her residence.

One of the great secrets of Chicago, if not the nation, is that 8 downtown buildings do not need Edison. In their sub-basement, carefully hidden by secret entrances from office workers, are atomic "pigs". Called that because the compact mechanisms seem to stand on feet like such an animal and operate much like in a nuclear-powered submarine. Using such cheap, efficient power, such buildings leave their lights on all night. Why? Turning the fluorescent bulbs and electronic devices on and off too much make them "pop".

In April, 1992, was a strange flood downtown Chicago, caused by a forgotten, no longer used tunnel crossing under the nearby river, somehow caving in. [Some claimed sabotage.] The tunnel was once used for narrow-track railroad cars running in tunnels under the downtown, to deliver coal and other items.

As the river flooded the downtown building basements, there was a growing danger it would inundate the sub-basements of the buildings with the secret atomic electricity. Only a handful of elite electrical engineers, pledged to national security and secrecy, ever knew about all this. If some kind of disaster almost happened, Chicagoans were never informed of the near-miss by the pressfakers.

Superstitious sorts worry about Friday the 13th. A day ahead of August 13, 1999, a Friday, a series of events seemed to spotlight Edison's foreign owners "milking" their worn out property. The result: businesses just west of downtown had their juice cut off. To avoid burning out other equipment, in a spreading problem, Edison gave only ten minutes warning notice it was going to shut off the power to part of downtown, called "The Loop" by locals. The first story claimed it all started when an Edison crew reportedly damaged a main cable.

Mayor Richard M. Daley, a devout Catholic, held a press conference and rightfully railed against Edison's bungling. Referring to the city's franchise agreement with Edison, he demanded they fire most of their engineers and get an outside engineering firm to rectify the endless black-out problems.

Cynics claim the whole mess is simply that the Pope wants to be rid of a growing hole in his pocket called Commonwealth Edison. Maybe the city will buy out Edison's old machinery for municipal electricity. [Years ago, it did not work in Cleveland because of massive media bombardment.] Wags contend its a scheme by the petroleum cartel to sell more candles. QUESTION: ARE THERE BUILDINGS WITH ATOMIC "PIGS" WHERE YOU ARE?